Met Office

January 2011

The averaging period used for the following assessment was 1981-2010.

UK overview

The first half of January saw the weather gradually revert to a more 'normal' Atlantic type - milder with some rain at times, especially across southern parts. However, the cold air was reluctant to loosen its grip across the northern half of the UK, temperatures there remaining lower with snow and ice at times. A very mild, wet and windy interlude followed around mid-month. The rest of the month was more settled, with high pressure nearby, but it was often cloudy and cold again at times.

Mean temperatures for the month as a whole were somewhat below the 1981-2010 average, especially over Northern Ireland and other western areas. Rainfall was close to or somewhat below normal in most places, but well above normal in south-east England and well below in Northern Ireland. It was a rather dull month across parts of East Anglia and south-east England but sunnier than normal towards the west and north, with Northern Ireland enjoying one of its sunniest Januarys on record.

A maximum temperature of 14.5 °C was recorded at Pershore College (Worcestershire) on 13th. A minimum temperature of -13.0 °C was recorded at Altnaharra (Highland) on 8th. In the 24 hours ending at 0900 on 16th, 106.8 mm of rainfall was measured at Brothers Water, near Patterdale (Cumbria). At Floors Castle (Scottish Borders), 22 cm of lying snow was reported at the start of the month. A wind gust of 76 mph was recorded overnight 15th/16th at Capel Curig (Conwy).

Weather Impacts

A chilly but relatively quiet start to the New Year in most areas. However, ice and snow continued to cause some inconvenience to drivers, especially in Scotland and on higher routes elsewhere. As people returned to work in Scotland on the 5th after the festive break, a series of accidents in icy conditions caused disruption on some trunk roads including the M8, M9 and A9. Further sleet and snow over northern areas on the 8th resulted in widespread icy roads and flight cancellations at Edinburgh airport.

From the 10th, attention turned to the accumulating rainfall across Wales and south-west England and localised surface water flooding. Heavy rain overnight on the 13th/14th resulted in the closure of some roads in south and mid-Wales, and the rail route between Bristol and Swindon after a tunnel flooded. Concerns then grew on 15th over the risk of flooding in many northern and western areas, with prolonged rainfall and the ongoing melt of upland snow particularly in Scotland. Parts of Perthshire and Fife were badly affected by flooding on the 16th with road closures. Heavy rainfall in west Cornwall during the evening of the 17th brought localised flooding with roads and homes affected.

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England diary of highlights

A rather cold start and end to January, with a much milder interlude around mid-month. The rest of the month was much drier, with high pressure established nearby, but with plenty of cloud throughout. The overall mean temperature was somewhat below the 1981-2010 average, particularly in western areas. Rainfall was over 25% above average in parts of south-east England, over 25% below from the Midlands towards north-east England and close to average elsewhere. Sunshine amounts were close to normal overall. It was sunnier than normal across parts of the west and much of the north but rather dull in the south-east, the third successive month with this contrasting pattern.

1st to 7th

On 1st a weak weather front brought colder air southwards with a few wintry showers in the north and east. Mainly dry on 2nd, then on 3rd showers spread across the south-west with snow over higher ground. On 4th a band of rain, sleet and snow spread into northern areas, with some showers across the south. After a frosty night in places, on 5th westerly winds brought bands of rain to many areas as temperatures recovered in the south, but wintry precipitation occurred again over northern hills. Further rain fell in many areas on 6th and 7th, with some snow over northern hills for a time on 7th.

8th to 17th

Further bands of rain or showers spread across many parts on 8th and 9th, with frost overnight on both days. Conditions became more unsettled on 10th with periods of heavy rain and strong south-westerly winds; 50.8 mm of rain was recorded at Shap (Cumbria) and 25.2 mm at Okehampton (Devon). Many areas became dry on 11th with some bright spells, but with further rain later. A band of heavy rain spread across many areas on 12th. Very wet weather continued on 13th and 14th, but it turned drier later on 14th. The 15th saw very heavy rain and strong winds, especially over the north-west (90.2 mm was recorded at Shap), and this rain spread south-eastwards on 16th. It was mild throughout the period 12th to 16th with daytime maxima over 11 °C; 14.5 °C was recorded at Pershore College (Worcestershire) on 13th. Some rain spread across the south on 17th, persisting in the south-east overnight, whilst the north remained drier.

18th to 23rd

Pressure rose on 18th with conditions becoming drier and brighter, but with some sharp overnight frosts. It was similar on 19th, but cloudier in the east with a little rain. Freezing fog patches formed, especially in the west Midlands. This settled weather persisted through 20th but with some cloud and rain in the south and sharp frosts and freezing fog overnight again in western areas. Frost and freezing fog were slow to clear on 21st, and Carlisle (Cumbria) reported a maximum of only -0.6 °C. High pressure was still close to UK through 22nd and 23rd giving mainly dry, chilly and cloudy weather.

24th to 31st

The 24th was a cold day with a good deal of cloud and north-westerly winds. Some rain spread southwards later in the day, with further periods of rain on 25th in the northerly flow. The 26th was similar, but with winds turning easterly it became colder, then much colder again on 27th and mainly dry. Temperatures remained low during the day; -0.6 °C was the maximum at Liscombe (Devon). It was a very cold night, followed by another cold day on 28th with strong easterly winds and temperatures again staying close to freezing in places. High pressure persisted through 29th and 30th, but the winds eased. Cloudy at times on 29th, but with some brighter periods on 30th, then a sharp frost overnight. Cold and dry at first on 31st, then rain reached the north-west later as westerly winds raised temperatures in the west.

Wales diary of highlights

A chilly first week was followed by a much milder, but wet and windy, spell. The second half of the month saw mainly settled weather, with high pressure established nearby, but also some hard frosts. Mean temperatures for the month were around 1.0 °C below the 1981-2010 average. Rainfall totals were close to, or a little below, average. It was sunnier than normal, especially in Pembrokeshire and other western areas.

1st to 4th

A weak cold front moving south on 1st brought some patchy light rain and sleet, with an anticyclone building across the UK later on 1st and during 2nd, before declining during 3rd and 4th. Some light snow fell for a time across parts of south Wales on 3rd. Temperatures were generally below normal, with some frosts at night.

5th to 14th

It became much more unsettled, quite windy and wet at times as a succession of frontal systems moved eastwards. There were a few brief drier spells, notably on 9th and 11th. It was generally cold at first with some snow falling across the high ground of north Wales for a time on 7th and some frosts at night, but it slowly became much milder with temperatures reaching 10 to 12 °C later in the period. There was some heavy rain at times with 30.2 mm at Capel Curig (Conwy) in the 24-hours to 0900 on 11th.

15th to 17th

This was a particularly wet and windy spell, especially over Snowdonia, where it rained continuously for 36 to 48 hours. A deep low to the north-west of the UK with a slow-moving front and a strong south-westerly flow enhanced the rainfall over high ground. Some large rainfall totals were recorded at Capel Curig, with 86.8 mm being recorded in a 12-hour period on 15th, and 149.0 mm in the 48-hours to 0900 on 16th. Wind gusts of 70 to 75 mph were also recorded at Capel Curig on 15th and 16th.

18th to 31st

This was a much quieter, mostly dry and colder period as an anticyclone moved in from the west on 18th and became slow-moving close to or over the UK for most of the rest of the month. However, a brief incursion of northerly winds and fronts on 25th and 26th brought rainfall totals of 10 to 15 mm to some parts on 25th. There were some hard overnight frosts at times especially in mid-Wales, with Sennybridge (Powys) recording minimum temperatures of -4.1 °C on 19th, -8.7 °C on 21st, and -10.2 °C on 31st.

Scotland diary of highlights

Generally cold weather persisted for the first 10 days, especially in the north and east, but milder conditions had spread to all areas by mid-month when it became windy and wet at times. The weather was mainly settled but somewhat colder in the last 10 days, with little further rainfall but plenty of cloud. The mean temperature for the month was slightly below the 1981-2010 average. Rainfall ranged from more than 25% below normal in much of north-east Scotland and the Northern Isles to close to average in the Borders. Sunshine totals were mostly above normal.

1st to 10th

Mostly cloudy on 1st, with some wintry showers in far north and north-east. Mainly dry but cold and mostly cloudy on 2nd, again with wintry showers in the north and north-east. Rain and sleet spread eastwards on 3rd with snow over higher parts of Strathclyde, and Dumfries and Galloway. Less cold on 4th with showers in west, becoming heavy and prolonged and extending to most places during the afternoon and evening. The rain soon died out followed by widespread ice in the south at first on 5th, then mainly cloudy with wintry showers mainly in the north. On 6th early wintry showers cleared the south to leave a sunny day. Snow showers were frequent in the north-west and far north on 6th and 7th, with heavy falls for Shetland and Lewis. Sleet and snow spread northwards across many areas overnight, with 7 cm recorded at Gogarbank (Edinburgh) at 0900 on 8th. Temperatures fell to -13.0 °C at Altnaharra (Highland) early on 8th. There were further snow showers on 8th, especially in Fife and Tayside later. A mainly dry and bright day on 9th before rain and snow moved into the north-west. The 10th was mostly cloudy with outbreaks of rain and hill snow. Temperatures were close to freezing in the north, but reached 8 °C around the Solway Firth.

11th to 18th

Rain and hill snow early and late on 11th, otherwise it was mainly dry and bright. Occasionally heavy rain, with mainly hill snow, on morning of 12th, cleared in afternoon as milder air moved into the south and west, but mist and fog developed. Outbreaks of heavy rain spread north-eastwards early on 13th, falling onto frozen ground in the north, before clearing to leave occasional showers in the west but sunshine in the south and east. Further heavy rain early on 14th cleared to leave sunny spells and showers, these heaviest and most frequent in the west. The 15th was windy with outbreaks of heavy rain, but drier across the far north and north-east. The rain cleared southwards early on 16th then bright with showers in north and west but still generally mild, reaching 12.8 °C at Machrihanish (Argyll and Bute). Mainly dry and bright in the south and east on 17th and 18th, Showers in the north and west, some heavy with hail and snow over the hills.

19th to 31st

Showers at first in the north on 19th, otherwise dry with bright or sunny spells. Dry and bright on the 20th with local freezing fog patches lingering throughout the day across central and southern Scotland. Mainly dry on 21st and 22nd with persistent fog in a few places. The 23rd turned cloudy and rain affected the north-west. It remained mostly cloudy on 24th with some rain, this heavy and persistent at times over the north-west Highlands. The 25th was another rather cloudy day with some rain, but mainly dry in the south and temperatures reached 10 °C. The period from 26th to the end of the month saw generally dry but cloudy conditions, with some patchy rain at times mainly in the north and west.

Northern Ireland diary of highlights

A chilly first ten days, with wintry precipitation, were followed by a milder and windier week. The second half of the month saw a generally settled spell but with some sharp frosts and fog. The mean temperature for the month was 1.3 °C below the 1981-2010 average. Rainfall was around 50% below average. Sunshine totals were over 50% above normal and it was one of the sunniest Januarys on record.

1st to 10th

Mainly cloudy on 1st with patchy rain and drizzle, but brighter in the north in the afternoon. Cloudy and rather cold on 2nd. A dry morning on 3rd before rain, sleet and snow later, and it was cold with top temperatures of only 2 or 3 °C. Less cold on 4th and mainly cloudy with showers or longer spells of rain, heavy at times. There were bright intervals and scattered showers on 5th. The 6th was mainly sunny, with a few snow showers in the north. After a sunny start it clouded over on 7th with rain, sleet and snow in the south and east. A frosty night followed with sunshine and wintry showers on 8th. A mainly dry and bright day on 9th, with a few wintry showers towards the north coast. The 10th was cloudy with outbreaks of rain.

11th to 17th

Milder on 11th with some sunny spells, before rain arrived late in the day. Mainly dry by the morning of 12th and then a mild but mostly cloudy day, with rain later. Overnight rain cleared to leave a rather cloudy but dry and mild day on 13th. Rain through the early hours of 14th soon cleared to leave sunny or clear spells and showers. It was windy with outbreaks of heavy rain on 15th, but drier with a little brightness at times in the east. Brighter on 16th with a few showers as winds eased. Mainly dry and bright on 17th but showers arrived in the north in the evening.

18th to 31st

Some showers in the north and west, otherwise dry with sunny spells on 18th. Dry and sunny from 19th to 22nd, but freezing fog patches persisted all day in places. There were some sharp frosts with temperatures falling below -5 °C widely, with -9.3 °C at Katesbridge (County Down) early on 21st. The temperature stayed below freezing all day on 21st at Aldergrove (County Antrim). After another frosty night, the 23rd turned cloudier, helping to clear the fog. The 24th and 25th were mostly cloudy with patchy rain and 26th was dry and mostly cloudy. Showers at first in County Down on 27th, otherwise it was a dry day. This dry and rather cloudy weather continued to 30th, with light winds. The 31st started dry, but was cloudy with rain later.

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